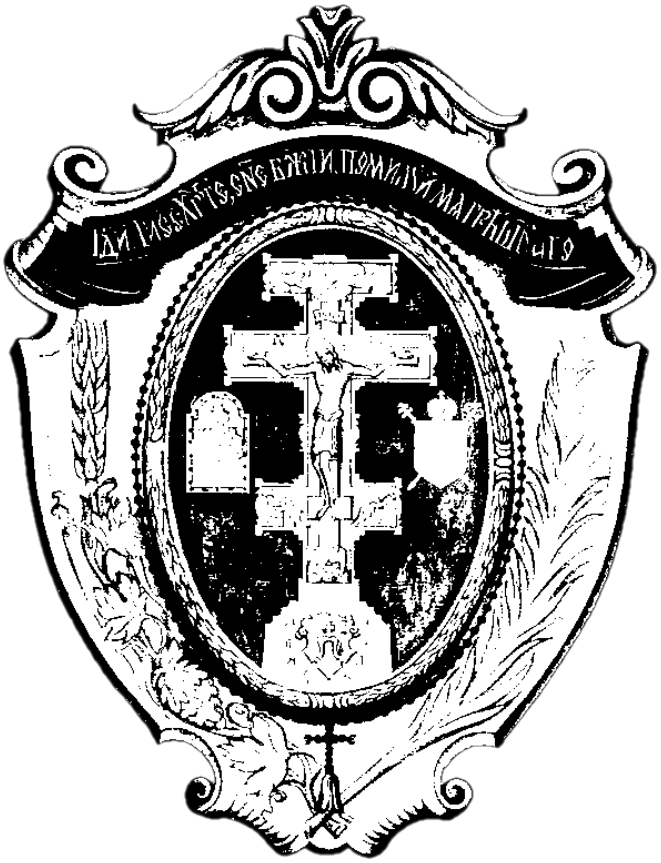
Studite Prayer

Short Compilation of Articles



Article I.
About the Jesus Prayer
By: Hieromonk Alipiy MSU

Most Christians of the Eastern tradition are likely aware of the existence of the so-called "Jesus Prayer." Some have only heard the expression "Jesus Prayer," others know how to pray it, while still others have made it a daily companion on their journey toward the Kingdom of Heaven. With this in mind, in this article we shall attempt to outline a general understanding of what the "Jesus Prayer" is and how it is practiced.

On the Christian East, the term "Jesus Prayer" refers to a short and repeated prayer that contains an invocation to Jesus Christ. The Jesus Prayer is, properly speaking, a prayer addressed to Jesus. Even the simple invocation "Jesus!" is already a prayer, though most often the Divine Name is clothed in shorter or longer formulas. From the fourteenth century onward, a well-known formula has been used in the Eastern Church: "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner!" Shorter formulations are also used, such as: "Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me!", or "Jesus, Son of God, have mercy on me!", even "Jesus, have mercy," or "Lord, have mercy," as we constantly invoke in our liturgical prayer.

The prototype of the Jesus Prayer is found in the Gospel: when Jesus was leaving Jericho, a blind beggar named Bartimaeus was sitting by the roadside and cried out, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" (Mk. 10:47). It is similar to the pleading cry of the Canaanite woman: "Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David! A demon is tormenting my daughter terribly." (Mt. 15:22). Likewise, it resembles the prayer of the tax collector: "God, be merciful to me, a sinner!" (Lk. 18:13). One who prays the Jesus Prayer asks God to forgive, to have mercy, to remit sins, and to grant the possibility of attaining the Kingdom of Heaven.

The History of the Jesus Prayer

The Jesus Prayer is a prayer of the New Testament, yet its roots reach back to the Old Testament. Its origins lie in the ancient biblical cult of the Divine Name among the people of Israel. According to Semitic mentality, the Divine Name is an emanation of God Himself: to the one who invokes it, knowledge and power are granted. If God's Name was invoked over a person or a place, they became God's own (Gen. 48:16; Amos 9:12). God's Name dwells in the Temple (1 Kgs. 9:3). The Divine Name is the guide of human life and service to God (Mic. 4:5). In the Psalms, God's Name appears as a refuge, a source of help, and an object of worship.

To invoke the Divine Name means to offer worship, to render cult to God, to pray to Him. In the Old Covenant God gradually reveals Himself. To Moses He reveals Himself as "I AM WHO AM" (Yahweh). The One who in His essence is above every name manifests Himself through many names: Eternal, All-Knowing, Almighty, All-Powerful, Light, Life, Joy... What is important is that God revealed Himself to Moses as a personal God, as a Person, as the One and Existing. Each new revelation disclosed another characteristic of Yahweh, but Moses was

aware of the incompleteness of his knowledge. The prophets sensed this as well. Every new revelation was experienced as a Theophany, as a direct act of God. For this reason the very Name was experienced as God's presence. Yet this Old Testament knowledge was incomplete, and so the prophets prayed for God Himself to come and grant full knowledge of Himself. The Name of Yahweh reaches its fulfillment in the Incarnation of the Son of God.

God reveals Himself in Christ Jesus. The angel gives Him the name Jesus (Mt. 1:21), which in Aramaic means "the salvation of Yahweh." The biblical teaching on the Divine Name reaches its perfection in the name of Jesus Christ. The first Christians found in the Name of Jesus the power of Yahweh. Thus the Old Testament prophecy of Joel—"Everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved" (Joel 3:5)—plays a major role in early Christian theology. Now salvation is granted to the one who calls upon the name of Jesus Christ: "There is no salvation through anyone else, for there is no other name under heaven given to the human race by which we must be saved." (Acts 4:12). Christians are those who call upon the name of Jesus (Acts 9:14, 21; Rom. 10:12–14), who heal the sick in His name (Acts 3:6; 9:34), cast out demons (Lk. 10:17; Acts 16:18), work miracles (Mt. 7:22; Acts 4:30), and through whom salvation is granted to believers (Acts 4:7–12). As we see, in these New Testament texts the "name" is identified with the person of Jesus Christ Himself. Early Christians professed their faith by saying: "Jesus Christ," "Jesus the Messiah," "Son of God," and especially "Lord." They even inscribed the name of Jesus on documents and objects, as archaeological research confirms.

Three New Testament texts show the importance of honoring the name of Jesus. Presented in chronological order: the Apostle Paul (Phil. 2:9–10): "God highly exalted Him and bestowed on Him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend in heaven, on earth, and under the earth." The speech of the Apostle Peter before the Sanhedrin: the aforementioned Acts 4:12. And a third text, Jn. 16:23–24: "Amen, amen, I say to you: whatever you ask the Father in my name, He will give you. Until now you have not asked anything in my name. Ask and you will receive, so that your joy may be complete."

Faith in Jesus Christ spread through the world with great fervor. Thus Origen, the Christian teacher of the third century, notes that in his own time the name of Jesus still acts with the same power as in apostolic days: "Even today the name of Jesus calms troubled souls, destroys demons, heals diseases; its use pours forth wondrous sweetness, fosters moral purity, and inspires humanity, generosity, and meekness..."

The development of the Jesus Prayer, in the full sense of the word, is owed above all to monks, masters of the interior spiritual life. St. Anthony the Great (+356), for example, expelled a demon by using the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. The same is recounted in the life of St. Hilarion (+378).

The Desert Fathers, through their spiritual life, prepared the emergence of the Jesus Prayer. In their private prayers they used short prayer formulas. St. Augustine (4th century) testifies to this: "It is said that in Egypt the brothers offer frequent prayers, but short and rapidly spoken." These words of St. Augustine became a general description for any type of "short prayers," which continue to be widespread in the spiritual practice of both the Eastern and Western Churches even to this day.

The chief aim of the Desert Fathers was to attain the state of unceasing prayer, that is, union with God (Lk. 18:1; 1 Thess. 5:17). From experience they observed that long, drawn-out prayers quickly bring on fatigue and inattention. Therefore, to avoid distraction the Fathers devised short prayers. St. John Cassian attests to their use in Egypt, on Sinai, in Palestine, in Syria, and throughout the Christian world. For example, the favorite formula of Abba Lucius was a verse from the 50th Psalm: "Have mercy on me, O God, according to Thy great mercy." Abba Isaac constantly repeated: "O God, come to my assistance; O Lord, make haste to help me!" (Ps. 69:2). St. Joannicius the Great used the prayer: "My hope is the Father, my refuge is the Son, my protection is the Holy Spirit." Abba Apollonius prayed: "I, as a man, have sinned; but Thou, as God, have mercy on me." Their characteristic features are brevity and simplicity, together with frequent repetition (meditation). They are like swift arrows shot toward the heart of God, allowing one to remain continually in His presence. "A short prayer focuses the mind which, not being bound to instruction, can in no way cease from wandering and roaming everywhere," says St. Isaac the Syrian. In the ascetical tradition such invocations of God are called "secret instruction," "the remembrance of God."

The Jesus Prayer arises as the result of the merging of two forms of Christian prayer: the "short prayer" and the "invocation of the Name." This took place in the mid-fifth century within the Sinai monastic tradition centered around the monastery of St. Catherine (the "Burning Bush" monastery) at the foot of Mount Sinai. The first written mention of the Jesus Prayer is found in St. Diadochus, Bishop of Photice (+486), who in his book *One Hundred Chapters on Spiritual Perfection* recommends the purification of the heart through the "remembrance of Jesus," which not only purifies but also enkindles: "It is necessary always to cry out: Lord Jesus!" His contemporary St. Nilus of Ancyra (+450) also taught about invoking the name of Jesus. In the following centuries the practice of the Jesus Prayer became widely known. It is mentioned in the *Ladder* of St. John (+649), and the work *On Watchfulness and Virtue* by Hesychius of Sinai (8th–10th c.)—(in the *Philokalia* it is mistakenly attributed to Hesychius of Jerusalem)—is among the most important treatises on the Jesus Prayer; it is the first systematic exposition of its theory and practice. In the Sinai period, the invocation of the name of Jesus Christ and the brief one-phrase prayer coalesced into a single teaching on the Jesus Prayer, though still without a fixed formula.

We owe the well-known formula, "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner!" to the monks of the Holy Mountain Athos. At the beginning of the fourteenth century Gregory of Sinai (+1346) came from Sinai to Athos, where he became an apostle of the Jesus Prayer to hermits, cenobites, and all who desired it. With the arrival of Gregory, Athos became the center of the practice of the Jesus Prayer. Among the noted Athonites are Gregory Palamas (+1359) and Sts. Kallistos and Ignatios Xanthopoulos, with their valuable work *Directions for Those Who Practice Sacred Stillness*, among many others. In this period an auxiliary psychosomatic technique for the Jesus Prayer was developed.

Around the fifteenth century the Jesus Prayer spread from Athos to our lands. A new surge of interest arose on Athos at the end of the eighteenth century following the 1782 Venetian publication of the Greek anthology of ascetical-mystical writings of the Fathers known as the *Philokalia* ("love of beauty"). In 1793 Paisius Velichkovsky, a native of Poltava, published in Church Slavonic the collection of patristic writings *Dobrotolubie*

(the *Philokalia*). Numerous later reprints of the *Dobrotolubie* showed the immense interest in prayer—and in particular the Jesus Prayer—among our people.

"Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner!"

Having outlined the history of the Jesus Prayer's emergence, let us now pause to reflect on our traditional form of this prayer: "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner!" As we may note, the prayer consists of two parts: the address to Jesus Christ—"Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God"—and the plea for mercy: "have mercy on me, a sinner!" As one spiritual writer aptly put it, the whole Gospel is gathered into the Jesus Prayer. For in it we express the most important truths of our faith: God became man for our salvation, and the cause of our fall and our miseries is sin.

In addressing Jesus we call Him Lord—that is, the Master who reigns over all; Christ—that is, the Anointed One, the mediator between God and men; and Son of God—the second Person of the Most Holy Trinity, equal to the Heavenly Father.

In the second part we confess our sinfulness, imperfection, and weakness in every dimension of our being. "Have mercy," from the Greek *eleison*, is an ancient word signifying tender and compassionate pity. Its image is the Good Samaritan, a symbol of Jesus Christ, who shows mercy to the man beaten and left half-dead (Lk. 10:25–37). We need such mercy from God throughout our entire life and in every circumstance.

Let us note that the Jesus Prayer is the joining of the Incomprehensible God with finite man, of the Creator with the creature. By God's grace—and by our modest cooperation—this existential gulf is bridged.

Some guidelines for practicing the Jesus Prayer

The time has come to dwell on the practice of the Jesus Prayer, for without practice it will remain merely notional for us, and we will not attain the spiritual treasures hidden within it. All the faithful may pray this prayer—laity, clergy, monastics, the elderly and the young. The degree of one's participation in the Jesus Prayer, its intensity in our life, will depend not only on our desire, but also on our circumstances and duties. For example, a married person will not likely have as much opportunity to pray the Jesus Prayer as a monk or nun, to whom, during the rite of tonsure, a prayer rope is given with words encouraging its constant use. For some the Jesus Prayer will be only a moment in life; for others, a practice alongside other prayers; and for a few, a way of life and a necessity. Our practice will reveal how much we need it.

The praying of the Jesus Prayer should take place within an ecclesial context. It presupposes, of course, that the one who prays is a practicing Christian—attending the Church's services, confessing frequently, and receiving the Holy Mysteries of Christ. For the Jesus Prayer is a means by which we deepen the grace given us in Baptism. It is also called "spiritual Communion," by which we deepen our union with God received at the Liturgy in Holy Communion. It is very beneficial to have a spiritual guide who can advise regarding difficulties and questions that will surely arise in the course of prayer.

When beginning the Jesus Prayer, one must first set aside time for it. This time should be an exclusive and intense meeting with God. Choose a time and place where you can have quiet and solitude. It helps greatly to keep to the same time and place each day. When prayer becomes a rule of life for us—not merely an occasional, spontaneous enthusiasm—it has greater power to uproot every search for self-gratification and the comforts of life.

Establish for yourself, or receive from a spiritual father, a rule of prayer. It is best to begin with a small number of prayers and not hurry to increase it. The rule should be such that we can fulfill it daily—not too small, but not too large. For beginners, 10–20 minutes, or 50–100 Jesus Prayers, may be recommended.

Before commencing, pause briefly to free your spirit from previous occupations and cares. Become aware before whom you are standing and who you are—that you are standing before God. For this, the usual opening prayers of the services are fitting: "Heavenly King," "Most Holy Trinity," "Our Father," and so on. The prayers should be pronounced without haste. You may kneel, or sit with a straight back so as not to fall asleep, or stand; you may make several bows (prostrations) to help maintain attention. It is advisable to count the prayers on a prayer rope, so this does not require separate attention.

Slow and rhythmic recitation greatly helps to unify and harmonize every corner of our person—body, mind, feelings, and spirit. However, against this prayer all the destructive passions and attachments within us will rise up—all the idols we serve more readily than the living God. Great distraction may arise; then you must cling to the name of Jesus "like a drunkard to a plank." We must remember that the saving power of this prayer lies not in our efforts or self-control, but in the working grace of God, who alone can grant us victory, so that God becomes our only treasure.

On days when we feel entirely unable to fulfill the rule, let us not abandon it altogether, but at least complete some small portion of it. Again, when at some moment our spirit longs to remain longer in prayer, let us not forbid ourselves, but neither should we immediately impose a larger rule.

The words of the Jesus Prayer are there to keep our mind and thoughts with God, for left to themselves they will scatter in every direction, reminding us of and inventing all manner of necessary and unnecessary things. But when we sense that our inner being has been warmed and burns with love for God, then we have reached the goal of prayer, and we need not insist on reciting the words until again the spirit cools and our thoughts begin to drift away from God.

A great difficulty can be the very monotony of the words, yet we must not seek rescue in a variety of thoughts, but rather by intensifying our awareness of God's inexhaustible love by which He fills and transforms us. In doing so, let us remember not to pronounce the words with the mind alone; let your mind "descend into the heart," unite with it, and thus say the prayer.

Throughout the day, outside the time of the rule, let us also strive to repeat the Jesus Prayer aloud or within ourselves. It may be prayed "at home and on the road, at work and at table, and in bed—from the moment you

open your eyes until the moment you close them; it will be as though you were keeping things in the sunlight, for it means remaining before the face of the Lord, who is the sun of the spiritual world," teaches Abba Philemon. In doing this, do not count the number of prayers, lest inwardly you begin to glory in your achievements.

Every prayer, including the Jesus Prayer, develops in three stages: first, vocal recitation; then, understanding what is said; and then, feeling of the heart. Because the Jesus Prayer is simple and short, the second stage is rather compressed. The advantage of short, repeated prayers is that there is a passage from vocal recitation directly to the prayer of the heart. The Jesus Prayer does not develop our discursive understanding; on the contrary, it helps the person to grow silent within: "the mind descends into the heart," as spiritual authors explain. It is then that an authentic encounter of the person with God occurs, for He dwells in the human heart: "The Kingdom of God is within you!" (Lk. 17:21). Finally, the Lord, seeing our persistence in prayer, may grant us the gift of unceasing prayer—the state of a heart that does not forget God. Such a gift was attained by those whom we call saints; among them St. Francis of Assisi, of whom his disciple said: "Francis no longer prays; he has become prayer."

The practice of the Jesus Prayer brings many spiritual fruits, the greatest of which is union with God already here on earth—"taste and see that the Lord is good" (Ps. 33:9)—an experience of the Kingdom of God which is yet to be fulfilled. Beyond this, the Jesus Prayer is a powerful weapon against temptations—"heavy artillery" against the enemy (Paisios the Athonite). It heals our relationship with God and, thereby, heals our inner disintegration caused by sin. Such great gifts are available to us Christians of the twenty-first century; "Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on earth?" (Lk. 18:8). With trust and patience let us approach the Lord Jesus Christ, and He will surely help us to find our personal path in the Jesus Prayer.

Article II.

There is No Work on Earth More Important than Prayer

By: Hieromonk Onufriy

"There is no work on earth more important than prayer." (Elder Schema-Archimandrite Zachariah)

I. The Holy Fathers on Prayer

"Prayer is the soul's conversation with God, a branch from the tree of humility and meekness, a manifestation of joy and thanksgiving, a remedy for sorrow and sluggishness, the lifting of the mind to God."

(St. Nilus of Sinai)[2].

"Prayer, in its operation, sustains the world and unites it with God; it is the mother and daughter of tears, reparation for sins, a bridge for crossing temptations, a wall that protects us from afflictions, the destruction of battles, the work of Angels, the nourishment of all incorporeal beings, future joy, unlimited activity, the source of virtues, the wellspring of graces, invisible progress, the food of the soul, the enlightenment of the mind, the axe laid to despair, the expression of hope, the destruction of sadness, the wealth of monks, the treasure of the hesychasts, the softening of anger, the mirror of spiritual growth, the knowledge of progress, the revelation of the soul's order, the disclosure of future reward, the sign of glory."

(St. John Climacus)[3].

II. Interpersonal Communion in Love

Prayer is an inseparable part of every religion. Through prayer, the believer can come into contact with his Creator. Through prayer, a person who contemplates the beautiful world glorifies the Creator of Beauty. Through prayer, the human being brings his joys and sufferings before the Highest Being, Who alone is able truly to heal wounds and grant happiness.

"Prayer, in its nature, is the communion and union of the human person with God."

(St. John Climacus)[4].

God is not some abstract energy diffused throughout the universe, nor a lifeless idol—the work of human hands. God is a personal Being, not dead but living (Acts 14:15)—the Loving Father who at every moment is ready to embrace every person, like the prodigal son, in His gentle Fatherly arms.

One cannot know God simply by gathering a large amount of information and knowledge about Him, for the infinite and eternal God is incomprehensible and never fully grasped by the limited human mind. By such a method we can only learn about God. But if we truly wish to know God Himself, we must go another way: enter into communion with Him in love.

We cannot come to know a person—their inner world—unless that person reveals himself. And the more such contact is filled with love, the more deeply people open themselves to one another.

III. Is Prayer Difficult?

Many people experience that daily prayer, whether communal (in church) or personal, is not such an easy thing, and for some, morning or evening prayer is a heavy burden, or simply a distracted "reading through" or "saying through."

"Prayer is hard work. Why make such an effort? These prayers or services do not achieve anything right away. So why dedicate so much time to them?" some Christians ask.

Everything that is valuable requires effort. And the more important the goal, the more effort a person expends to attain it. Through prayer we attain the most important goals of life: union with God, peace of heart, a sense of community, and above all we reach the ultimate goal: the deification and salvation of the human person.

To grow in holiness, one must work on oneself. Thus, the labor of prayer leads to Eternal Life. From the days of John the Baptist until now, the Kingdom of Heaven is taken by force, and the violent seize it (Mt. 11:12).

Jesus Christ calls to us: Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you… For my yoke is sweet and my burden light (Mt. 11:28–30). Christ's yoke becomes light only when we freely accept it. If a burdened person sincerely opens himself before God, expressing his difficulties, He Himself will lighten the burden and give the grace of sincere prayer.

Whether prayer becomes a burden for us depends on our attitude toward God. Can loving communion with a beloved girl be a burden for a young man? This communion is not a burden for him; rather, he longs for the meeting with his beloved. If we truly love God, our Father and Benefactor, how can prayer be burdensome?

IV. "Be Perfect as Your Heavenly Father Is Perfect (Mt. 5:48)**"**

With these words, Our Lord Jesus Christ calls us to deification and holiness. The essence of spiritual life is the spiritual growth of the person toward perfection. Christ indicated the road to fulfillment: You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind; this is the greatest and first commandment. And the second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets (Mt. 22:37–40). Thus, spiritual growth is growth in love. And love "no one can produce in himself by sheer willpower, forcing himself to it." Love is "a pure gift that must be received" from God[5].

"A person can never truly be good, no matter how much he wishes it, unless God Himself dwells within him, for no one is good except God alone."

(St. Anthony the Great)[6].

Therefore at the beginning of every prayer we invoke the Holy Spirit: "Come and dwell within us and cleanse us from every stain."[7] Without prayer, spiritual growth is impossible. For it is through prayer that a person acquires the Holy Spirit, acquires God, who is Love. A spiritual person is one "who allows the Holy Spirit to fill him gradually, shows His action to all, reminds others about God, and calls them to Him"[8].

For Christians, God is Love (1 Jn. 4:8). To know Love, one must look upon God: For God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son, so that everyone who believes in Him may not perish but have eternal life (Jn. 3:16).

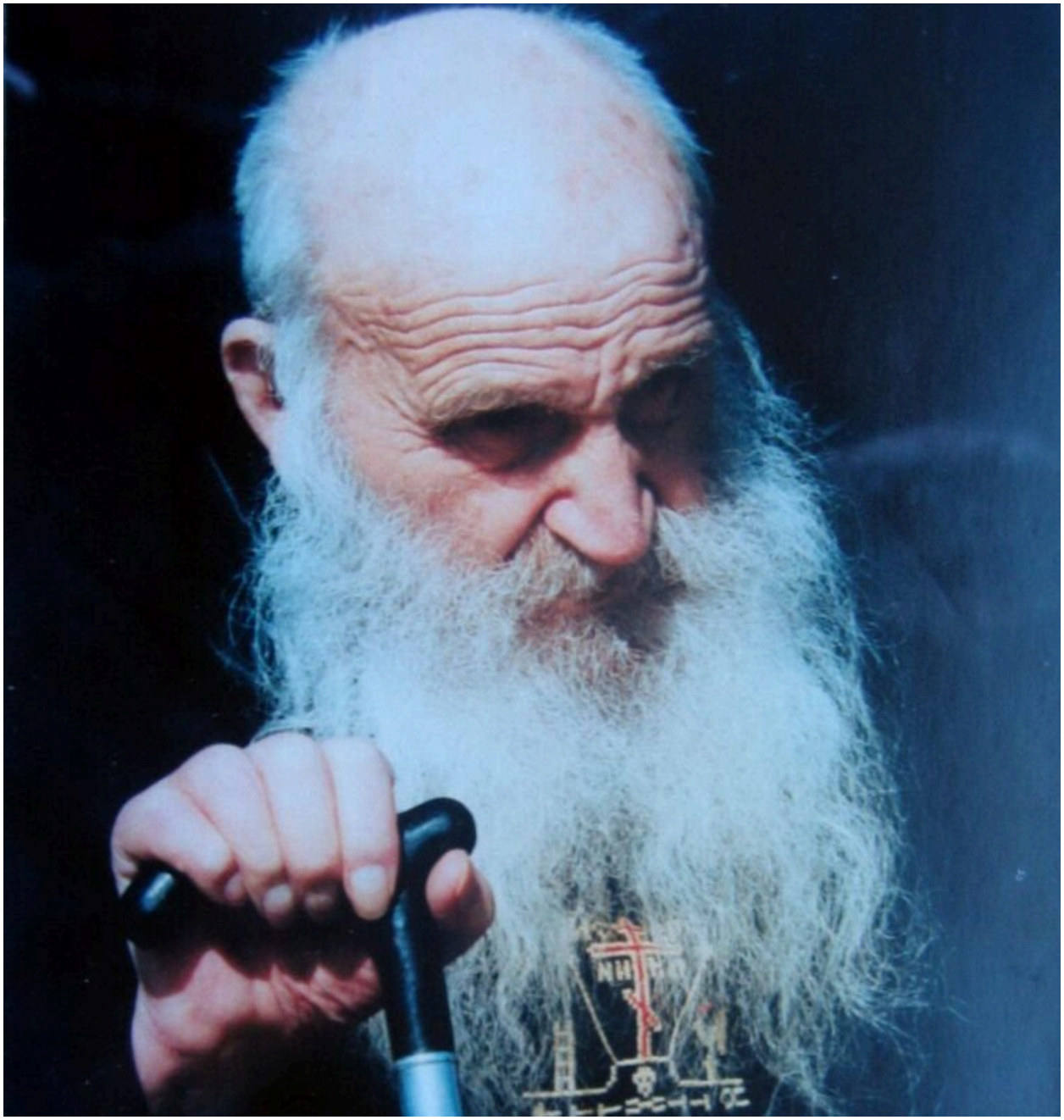
V. The Mind's Summoning to the Contemplation of God

St. Anselm of Canterbury

Come now, man, withdraw for a little while from your occupations; for a short time separate yourself from your restless thoughts. Cast aside your burdensome cares and postpone your laborious exertions. Make some room within yourself for God, and rest a little in Him. "Enter into the rest" of your mind. Drive out everything except God and whatever helps you seek Him; and, "with the door shut," seek Him. Say, "My whole heart," say: "I seek Your Face," "Your Face, O Lord, I seek" (Ps. 26:8).

But now, O Lord my God, teach my heart where and how to seek You, where and how to find You. Lord, if You are not here, where shall I find You absent? And if You are everywhere, why do I not perceive You present? Truly, You dwell in "unapproachable light" (1 Tim. 6:16). Where is this unapproachable light? Or how shall I approach the unapproachable light? Or who shall lead me into it, that I may behold You in it? ... What shall Your

servant do, tormented with love for You, yet cast far from Your Face? (Ps. 50:13). He burns with zeal to see You, yet Your Face is absent. He desires to approach You, yet Your dwelling is unapproachable. He longs to find You, yet does not know Your place. Lord, You are God and You are my Lord—yet I have never seen You. You created me and re-created me, and all the good that I possess You have bestowed upon me—yet I do not know You. In the end, I was created for this very purpose: to behold You—and still I do not accomplish what I was created for.



Elder Pavlo

Article III.
Healing by Faith

By: Hieromonk Oleksandr

Health is a great gift from God for the human person. A believing person accepts sufferings, including illnesses, as an unavoidable component of life in which nothing is accidental. The Lord, the Lover of Mankind, in His care for a person's eternal life, allows sufferings and sicknesses to enter her life. In sickness, one must turn to God, for He is the Master of life. *"My son, in your sickness do not be dismayed; pray to the Lord, and He will heal you"* (Sirach 38:9). Jesus Christ is our Savior and the healer of bodies and souls. *"He cast out the spirits with a word and healed all the sick"* (Mt. 8:16). Jesus Christ handed on to His apostles the power to heal the sick. *"And calling His twelve disciples, Jesus gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal every disease and every infirmity"* (Mt. 10:1). Just as the Lord healed through His apostles, working through them in this world, so even now the Savior heals, working through His Church, through the holy Mysteries and through prayers of healing.

In Kyivan Rus', monasteries became centers of enlightenment and culture, engaged in the spread of knowledge, including medical knowledge. Monastic chronicles speak of ascetic monks who became renowned for the gift of healing. Among such ascetics of piety were St. Anthony, Sts. Damian, Olympius, and Agapitus of the Caves, St. Pimen, and others. Near monasteries, buildings were constructed in which the sick were treated free of charge. Much later, the secular type of physician and secular hospital developed, yet even then every medical institution had a hospital church and cooperation between priest and doctor. The priest helped overcome the spiritual-moral source of the illness, and the doctor addressed the biological cause of the illness. As St. Basil the Great teaches, one's attitude toward medicine ought to be moderate, with trust in God: one should not exaggerate the role of medicine, but neither should one reject it. Our prayers for physicians assist them in the successful treatment of the sick.

"The fervent prayer of a righteous man has great power" (Jas. 5:16). The Lord raises up righteous ones for our salvation. The higher the power of evil rises, the more strongly God's grace calls people to greater struggles and grants them the strength needed for them. In monasteries, the Lord may call a monk or hieromonk to the ascetic life of eldership. People recognize a venerable and God-bearing elder by the worn thresholds—worn down by the many feet that have walked there to reach him. When people seek the truth with all their hearts, the Lord will raise up for them a saint who, by his life and by

his word, will show them the path to truth. For his flock, an elder gives spiritual birth to the faithful in the font of baptism, cleanses them from sins in the Mystery of Penance, unites them with Christ Himself in the Mystery of the Eucharist, intercedes before God for them in prayer, and by God's grace heals spiritual and bodily infirmities. An elder heals the whole person. He is responsible for his spiritual child to the extent that the spiritual child is obedient to him in matters pertaining to spiritual life.

Such an elder and confessor of the Christian faith in the UGCC was the schemamonk of the Studite Rule, Fr. Pavlo (Porphyrius) Chuchman (+2001), who lived in the monastery of St. Elijah the Prophet in Dora (Yaremche). He was richly endowed by God with the grace to heal spiritual and bodily illnesses and to unite people with the Lord. Through his conscientious service in the Lord's vineyard, our merciful Lord Jesus Christ brought thousands of people into His Heavenly Kingdom. Suffering is never easy, and only the power of Jesus Christ makes victory over suffering possible. *"He who has learned to thank God for his illnesses is not far from holiness"* (St. John Chrysostom). Those who came to Elder Pavlo for spiritual conversation in difficult life circumstances returned strengthened, uplifted in spirit by prayer and counsel, and with the understanding that their suffering was not a misfortune, as they had previously thought, but a spiritual blessing. During illness, one must necessarily give attention to one's spiritual life. Fr. Pavlo taught his faithful that the door through which the grace of healing is received is our repentance. After confession with the elder, spiritually renewed people rejoiced, feeling lightness of soul, spiritual elevation, and happiness. The father was marked by great simplicity, gentleness, and kindness in his attitude toward the sick who came to him daily for help. People felt genuine care and were filled with deep trust toward the elder. When he gave advice on how to set their lives in order, they accepted and steadfastly fulfilled it, for every instructive word from him was holy to them.

Our Eastern Church possesses an unbroken tradition of helping her faithful in illness through prayers of healing and healing by faith. The prayers of healing found today in our Church's euchologia, as well as in those from past centuries, may be divided into prayers for psychosomatic illnesses and prayers for deliverance from demonic influence. The Church, caring for her faithful, helps them find health in the Lord. Healings strengthen us in faith, bring joy to the soul, give strength for life, and aid in salvation. Through prayers for deliverance from demonic influence, the Lord frees our mind, will, and body from the devil's bondage, sends peace, and purifies the world from the power of evil.

Bent low toward the earth, the elderly schemamonk Pavlo, with his long snow-white beard, begins to read the prayers of healing. A deep silence reigns in the chapel. With great emotion and attentiveness, the people listen to the quiet and slow words addressed to the Lord. From the depths of their hearts the people also beseech God's grace of healing. When a sick person's condition required more attention, Fr. Pavlo prayed longer for him from the old Euchologion. Once, the father read the prayers of this rite

over a paralyzed man and told him that when he recovered, he should come from his house to the monastery on foot. Two weeks later this man came to the monastery to thank God and Fr. Pavlo for his recovery. Many miraculous healings occurred, and this was regarded as natural—for the monk-priest had prayed the prayers. According to my own observations, the miraculous healings occurred most often when Elder Pavlo, with a softened heart and tears in his eyes, begged God to show mercy to the sick person. Countless are the grateful people who received spiritual and bodily healing through our father.

We ask prayers to the Lord for the glorification of the virtuous life of Schemamonk Pavlo. If anyone today asks the father for help in difficult life circumstances, he

wondrously assists from heaven. Here is one more short story about Elder Pavlo. Wondrous is God in His saints.

Article VI.

Wisdom of Elder Oleksandr

Recorded from a video-conversation of Hieromonk Luka (Mykhailovych) with Elder Oleksandr.

Today at the Holy Dormition Univ Lavra the Funeral Service is underway for the newly-departed Elder, Schema-monk Oleksandr (Kilar), who reposed on the Eve of Theophany. We offer for your reflection the elder's thoughts on the path to holiness, on love, and on monasticism—thoughts he once shared in a conversation with Hieromonk Luka (Mykhailovych).

I. On Holiness

In my understanding, holiness is above all an invitation from Jesus that we be holy. Holiness means to possess the characteristics of God. Holiness is to have great love, to perfect oneself through love. The principle of love is not the most important thing; the most important is God Himself—to be like God. For us, the most important thing is the love that is holiness. Jesus said, "Be perfect as the Father," and this is taken from the Book of Leviticus, where it says: "Be holy, for I am Holy."

II. On the Importance of Holiness

If holiness is important, then unity with God is most important of all. The center of everything is God. As we simply draw near to God, we become like Him, because we take on His Spirit.

III. On the Beauty of Holiness

For me, holiness is something beautiful, for the one who possesses holiness to some degree is the most beautiful in spiritual terms. Then there is fullness of goodness, fullness of an inner moral refinement which is very lovely—like a flower that gives forth its goodness. Every person who sees this loves it, desires it, because every soul longs for God, longs for love. A holy person radiates what is in God Himself. Holiness has its demands and its own system by which one should walk in order to reach holiness.

IV. The Gospel System of Holiness

The system comes from the teaching of Jesus. In the Gospels Jesus teaches us and shows us how to be holy. Before all else He is concerned that we be saved, and then that we become holy. One may say that holiness is the greatest achievement of a person in this world. I am not speaking here of the vocation to the priesthood—that is a very particular relationship with God. I am speaking of the general condition of a human being. A person's accomplishment in this world does not consist in being a specialist or an expert in some field, or a great leader or an artist; for me the greatest achievement of a person is holiness, because holiness brings forth the greatest good.

V. On Purity of Heart

A pure heart may be 100%, it may be 90%, 80%. Better that it be 90% than 80%. A pure heart is a heart filled with the Holy Spirit. Then the heart is pure to the degree that it is without sin. And what is sin? A thought, a desire, a judgment that is not in accordance with the Holy Spirit, with God Himself.

VI. On God's Love and the Virtues

Love is rather holiness. I reflect on the word "love," because it can mean so many other things. To speak of the love we are speaking of is to speak, rather, of holiness—love that is made like

the love of God. God is in that harmony of love. God is more than love. In true love there is no selfishness; love stands above the virtues. The lowest degree of love is to have no enmity.

VII. On the Gospel Foundations of Monasticism

I see the foundation of monasticism in the Gospels in the episode where the rich young man came to Jesus: "I want to be perfect." "Then sell all that you have, give the money to the poor, and follow Me." The group to which Jesus calls the rich young man would be monasticism. We have been called; we have come after Jesus.

VIII. On the Elder's Asceticism [new article]

The elder's asceticism was hidden from the ordinary gaze of people—even from the monks who lived with him. Fr. Oleksandr's ascetical practices were present in everything, although outwardly he did not stand out from any of us in any way. Brother Oleksandr renounced the comforts and pleasures of life for the sake of self-perfection and to attain certain spiritual goals.

We arranged his cell in such a way that he could lead a hermit-like way of life. Yet only with time did I understand that he did not use his bed for sleeping as we normally do. He used a soft armchair to rest, and his bed was filled with books. The brothers who would visit him for conversation can testify to this. He had a bathroom, but he did not use it; rather, he wiped his body with a damp towel. Yet none of us ever noticed him being untidy. At eighty years old he kept himself in remarkable order and cleanliness.

I also recall that the elder begged me not to send him to doctors. He had no teeth in his old age, and I thought to call a dentist to his cell to put his teeth in proper condition. He would fold his hands as if for prayer before me, thank me as best he could, and politely refuse. After his death, his niece from America, Lyudmyla, told us that she had often offered him dental care—she herself is a dentist—and he always answered that he would settle such matters with God.

When the father reposed in January 2020, right after the funeral we began putting his belongings in order. I thought that we might now learn whether he had been taking any medicine. Suddenly I found in a drawer a box from medication, with an image of a heart and vessels on it. I thought to myself that likely the elder had heart problems. The doctors had listed heart failure as the cause of death. I took the box into my hands, thinking I would be the

first in the monastery to learn about Fr. Oleksandr's illness—and I saw inside the box a Marian rosary instead of medicine tablets.

I began to read what was written on the box: "*Miloserdynka* — 59 grains for the heart.
Ingredients: 100% rosary.
Indications: for spiritual lukewarmness; helps in walking the path to holiness; overcomes temptations; heals from remorse of conscience; frees souls from Purgatory."

This, dear brothers, is exactly how the father treated his illnesses.

The ascetical life of our striver manifested in a particular way in his eating. Probably no one knows exactly how long the father could abstain entirely from food. At times the meal we brought him would remain untouched for a day or two. He always wanted to be in solidarity with the Univ brotherhood in matters of fasting, and so he always strictly observed the fasting rules established in the Lavra. He always asked me: "Father, how will the brothers eat tomorrow for this fast?" He did not want us to bring him richer or more caloric food. In time I also learned that the elder never drank wine. For him, St. John the Baptist—who also had vowed not to touch strong drink—was an example.

Once the elder said that St. John continually grew in holiness. For growth to occur, he said, there must always be change. "I change," he said, "I exchange a lower level for a higher one. Spiritually it is thus: I change a lower state of love and move to a higher understanding of love. Then within me there is the state of grace of the Holy Spirit."

To pass from the first to the second, a change must occur within me. And for that change to occur, I must be filled with the Holy Spirit—I must be deified. To be deified, one must do certain things that lead to that divine state: prayer, striving to be honest, performing spiritual exercises, repenting, confessing. These things lead me to a higher state. Thus repentance and all the rest bring me each day into a deeper spiritual life. We fall, we repent, we rise and go to God; again we fall, repent, shake off the dust, pray, look back and say, "Lord, give me strength." We look back in order to learn from that fall—not from some miserable, conscience-sick reason when we say, "Lord, why did I fall?" Such a thought does not come from God but from our pride, from our super-ego.

IX. The Prayer of Elder Oleksandr

Very often on Sundays after breakfast I would bring the father coffee to the room where he was already receiving people. I would apologize to his visitor and say to the elder, "You have not yet eaten or drunk today, so please have a little coffee." He would always drink it. But about three years before his repose, he came to me and said: "It is so kind of you to bring me coffee, but I now wish to renounce it, because I desire to ascend to another degree of prayer. I want my prayer to be purer, because coffee slightly lifts and stimulates a person."

I could not cease marveling at such seriousness regarding prayer and the spiritual life. All his life he desired the most sincere relationship with God. The father recounted that from his youth he was fascinated by contemplative monasteries—those isolated from the world and living in pure contemplative prayer.

When he stood in church in prayer, it seemed that he was with the brothers only physically, while his soul soared on high in a sweet conversation with God. I noticed that he often held various prayer ropes and rosaries in his hands. Later I learned that people would ask the father to pray over their prayer ropes and rosaries.

Brother Oleksandr was generous toward the monastery's brotherhood and toward the people; he rarely refused requests of any kind. I had the opportunity to hear his vocal prayer in his cell a few times. He prayed the "Our Father," and it gave the impression that he was not merely reciting the words—this was a living dialogue with God, an intimate communication. More than once, when watching him in church, I thought that the brother was not praying—he himself "became prayer." And then I was convinced of the truth of the patristic saying: "Pray, and then you will never sin."

The father said that when a person looks at sin, through prayer and purity of heart he does not allow the passions to enter the heart, and this fills both the mind and the heart with prayer. Then sin has no access. For the law is such: the mind can think of only one thing at a time; it cannot think of two things at the same moment. Sometimes it may seem to us that we think about various things simultaneously, but this is only an appearance.

Therefore, when we fill the mind with prayer and do not permit temptations to come, thoughts that are not pious and not in the Holy Spirit cannot proceed further, because we

abide in prayer. But when a person begins to give in to the temptations that come to him, he begins to think and act no longer in the Holy Spirit but in a human way—under the influence of the voices of the body, of energies, and of his own passions.

"Sin is distance from the Holy Spirit," said Elder Oleksandr. Sin is thoughts, words, or actions that are not aligned with the Holy Spirit. If we deviate even a little, we call this imperfection—small sins. If it is something greater, we call these daily sins. And if the deviation is very great and we seriously distance ourselves from God, we call these mortal sins, for they bring death to our soul.

St. Anthony the Great maintained constant prayer to such a degree in order to distance sin from himself as far as possible. Many in the monastery saw that at night the light in Elder Oleksandr's cell was on. Night was his time of prayer to God. He treasured night prayer, and more than once at conferences he extolled night vigils.

I would say that in his life, when the father lived in enclosure, he exchanged day for night. Once, Brother Hieronymus recounted that when he and Elder Oleksandr lived in the same cell in Zymna Voda, he noticed that the father prayed at night so that no one would see. He waited for Brother Hieronymus to fall asleep, and then he would quietly rise from bed and begin his night prayers.

During the eleven years that I lived in Univ under the same monastery roof as the father, I was often convinced how our ascetic, Elder Oleksandr, hid his spiritual labors in the evangelical manner:

"But when you pray, go into your room, shut the door, and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you."